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SUBJECT: REVIEWING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH DEPUTY
-- PRIME MINISTER DUNG

REF: A. Hanoi 567 B. Hanoi 175 C. Hanoi 842

[1](#)D. Hanoi 1263 E. Hanoi 907 F. 02 HCMC 966

[1](#)G. 02 Hanoi 2761

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Nguyen Tan Dung and the Ambassador (accompanied by DCM Porter and poloff) held a two-hour discussion on bilateral issues on May 27. The meeting received generally positive coverage in the state-controlled print and broadcast media. Dung highlighted recent positive developments, such as the recent National Assembly delegation visit to the U.S., increased educational exchanges through the Vietnam Education Fund (VEF), and the textile agreement. The Ambassador raised human rights and religious freedom issues; Dung claimed that persons of concern to the U.S. (and others) were prosecuted for "violating Vietnamese laws." Interestingly, Dung dangled the possibility of emigration to the U.S. by detained activist Dr. Nguyen Van Que, a proposal to which we will follow up. He also stated that US officials would be allowed to attend Que's trial. Concerning religious freedom, Dung admitted that some cadres in the Central and Western Highlands "do not understand" the GVN's policy on religious freedom. Dung expressed concern over reintroduction of the Vietnam Human Rights Act (VNHA) in the US Congress. Dung claimed that Vietnam is being treated unfairly over the catfish issue. (Septels will cover their discussion concerning the Ministry of Public Security and a separate meeting the Ambassador held with Ngo Yen Thi, the new chairman of the Religious Affairs Committee on May 28.) End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) This was the Ambassador's first meeting with DPM Dung since March 10, when they also covered a number of bilateral issues (ref a). Dung and the Ambassador agreed that a regular dialogue is useful to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of the bilateral relationship.

[1](#)3. (U) The meeting received coverage in state-controlled print and broadcast media. The Party's mouthpiece, "The People's Daily," noted that Dung and the Ambassador "exchanged views on issues of mutual concern. . . Vietnam attaches importance to its relations to the U.S." State television reported that ". . . it was inevitable for some problems to emerge during the course of improvement in ties . . ." The media reports did not specifically mention the discussions concerning human rights, religious freedom, and the Ministry of Public Security.

SOME GOOD DEVELOPMENTS

[1](#)4. (SBU) Dung said that, overall, the GVN "is happy" to see progress in the bilateral relationship. Specifically, he highlighted the "positive" results of Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) implementation, the recently concluded textile agreement, and the Vietnam Education Fund (VEF). Dung commented that the GVN is pleased to see the first group of students selected under the program. He noted that, generally, young people in Vietnam have a "favorable" view of the U.S. and many want to learn English and study there in programs like VEF and Fulbright. He also thanked the Ambassador for his help in raising funds to assist the French Hospital. Such activity, he noted, expresses the "good sentiments" of the USG towards Vietnam.

[1](#)5. (U) Dung said that the recent visit of the National Assembly delegation was "an appropriate step forward." The meetings with congressmen and veterans' organizations went well, he reported. In general, the GVN would like to see more official visits and exchanges because they improve "mutual understanding," he continued. The GVN is also looking forward to MFA Vice Minister Nguyen Dinh Bin's upcoming visit, as well future visits by Minister of Defense Tra, DPM Vu Khoan, and Foreign Minister Nien, he added.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Commenting on Dung's remarks, the Ambassador said that the textile agreement was "a complicated process," but "probably the best result possible." Regarding the VEF, he

said that the first group of participants had been selected. The Ambassador added that he would meet with VEF's leadership on his upcoming trip to the U.S. Concerning the National Assembly delegation, the Ambassador said that he had also heard it was quite successful and that people were especially impressed with the delegation's leader, Madame Ton Nu Thi Ninh. The Ambassador said that he was encouraged to see that VFM Bin is leading a delegation (leaving May 31) that will be engaging in outreach activities with the Vietnamese-American population (septel). The Ambassador noted that Bin's delegation seemed relatively "Northern," (as well as having at least one representative from the Ministry of Public Security - MPS), but if both sides "are willing to listen to each other, perhaps the mission will succeed." Commenting on the last statement, DPM Dung said that the GVN maintains a "consistent policy" concerning overseas Vietnamese, therefore whether officials are northern or southern "should not matter." However, he told the Ambassador that he would discuss the Ambassador's suggestion with to VFM Bin. (Comment: The GVN did add a southerner. End Comment)

HUMAN RIGHTS/RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

17. (SBU) The Ambassador explained to Dung that one purpose for this meeting was to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues. The Ambassador told Dung that USG concerns over human rights should not be construed as trying to change Vietnam's system or engaging in "peaceful evolution." The Ambassador said that he is sure to be asked human rights questions when he goes to Washington. Vietnam is getting increased attention along these lines. The Ambassador noted that Resolution Seven, adopted in January by the Seventh Plenum of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee, seemed positive in its recognition of the importance of religion. The Embassy is hoping to receive more clarification from the GVN and CPV about this Resolution, he added.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador said that he does not want to see our long-term goals (e.g., helping Vietnam become more integrated into the world community) affected by continuing problems with human rights. There are certain flashpoints that attract negative attention in the U.S. One is the treatment of Protestants in the Central and Western Highlands, where the GVN has a tendency to view all Protestants as "subversive" elements along the lines of the Dega separatists. The Ambassador said that he has met with local provincial leaders and some acknowledged this problem. He also pointed out that when officials from the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City visited Kon Tum province, some local officials were unaware that the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV) is now legal. The Ambassador further stated that we see many credible reports about church closings and forced conversions. There was even an MPS document from Khanh Hoa province that took credit for preventing the spread of Protestantism and convincing some people to abandon their faith.

19. (SBU) Another flashpoint, the Ambassador noted, is that Vietnamese citizens continue to be arrested for what we and other Western governments view as the "peaceful expression of their views." No one in the West is impressed with the typical GVN explanation that the people have broken the law - often the "laws" cited are inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and/or Vietnam's Constitution. The Ambassador said that, based on information we receive from various sources, we and other western nations maintain lists of persons of concern. He noted that German Chancellor Schroeder presented the EU's list to the Prime Minister during his May visit (ref d). The Ambassador pointed out that Vietnam could generate considerable good will by releasing these people.

10. (SBU) DPM Dung responded to the Ambassador politely, but firmly. Dung said that he "fully understood" the Ambassador's points and that Vietnam, as well as the U.S., needs to make more progress in the human rights area. The GVN, he continued, would give the Ambassador's points "careful consideration." Dung said that he did appreciate the Ambassador's efforts to explain human rights issues in Washington, because some officials there "have not received adequate information." Dung said that when he was in Washington, he had met with National Security Advisor Rice, who "expressed appreciation for our endeavors in human rights and poverty alleviation." He admitted, however, that Dr. Rice specifically expressed concern over Father Nguyen Van Ly. Dung said that he had told Dr. Rice that "we are dealing with that case in a consistent manner; however, we will consider immunity for Father Ly." Dung said that as the chairman of the GVN's Amnesty Committee, he would personally review Ly's amnesty request in the near future. In response to the Ambassador's question about the recent arrest of Father Ly's niece and nephew, Dung said that they

had violated Vietnam's espionage laws; he said that they would have a public trial. (Note: Embassy sources have heard that the expected May 30 trial has now been delayed. End note)

11. (SBU) Dung raised Dr. Nguyen Van Que, a human rights activist currently under investigative detention (refs e and f). Dung claimed that Dr. Que (and others) are imprisoned or under investigation not because of their human rights activities, but because they have broken Vietnamese laws. In Dr. Que's case, he will be prosecuted for espionage, specifically for giving national security information to several foreign non-governmental organizations. However, Dung suggested that the USG should help Dr. Que emigrate to the U.S. Ambassador responded that he understood Que had declined a similar offer (note: during his earlier imprisonment in 1999. end note) but would discuss this possibility when he met with Dr. Que's brother in Washington on June 2. He urged Dung to provide additional information about this case. Dung assured the Ambassador that Dr. Que would have a public trial; in response to the Ambassador's request, Dung stated that U.S. officials from our Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City would be allowed to attend.

12. (SBU) Dung noted that Vietnam wants to move forward on economic development, democracy, and transparency, all of which require stability. The GVN's concern is if "we free those who have violated our laws, we will have increasing instability."

13. (SBU) Concerning Resolution Seven, Dung explained to the Ambassador that this resolution "reaffirmed" the Party and GVN position that all 54 ethnic minority groups should be "united and equal and be mutually supportive for development." To exemplify, Dung noted that some ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands have been compelled to sell their land due to extreme poverty. The decree instructs the authorities to take problems like this into account when developing programs to raise their living standards.

14. (SBU) Concerning religious issues, Resolution Seven also reaffirms the GVN's policy of allowing citizens to choose their own religion. Dung admitted, however, that some local authorities have done better than others in implementing the policy. Dung told the Ambassador that "we do not permit anyone to use religion issues to affect Vietnam's stability." Concerning the Ambassador's point about the SECV, Dung claimed that he had "criticized" some local authorities for not implementing the GVN's official recognition of this church.

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

15. (SBU) Dung said that he remains concerned over the reintroduction of the VHRA in the U.S. Congress. He noted that, while the GVN understands the Department of State opposes the bill, he hoped the Ambassador would further explain to Congress why this bill would hurt the bilateral relationship. In addition, Dung continued, "we do not agree that a foreign body like the U.S. Congress has the right to comment on our human rights record - after all, the U.S. waged war here and killed millions - we cannot forget that." The Ambassador advised Dung that Vietnam should get used to other countries commenting on Vietnam's human rights performance. The Ambassador pointed out that the U.S. itself receives human rights criticism from the EU Parliament. As for the War, the Ambassador said that it is important to focus on the future and "both sides have a role in that." Dung said that he agreed on this point: "it is the GVN's policy and the will of the Vietnamese people to look to a bright future in our bilateral relationship."

16. (SBU) The Ambassador told Dung that he has consistently voiced his personal opposition to the VHRA. He has met (and will continue to meet) with Congressmen and explain to them why this bill would be a mistake. On the other hand, he continued, the GVN could make it easier for the Department to oppose the bill if it improved its record on human rights along the lines we had just discussed. The Ambassador also explained that the GVN exaggerates the practical effect if the bill did pass.

CATFISH

17. (SBU) In a brief segue to the catfish issue, Dung told the Ambassador that the U.S. Department of Commerce's decision to designate Vietnam a non-market economy (ref g) was "not objective." Dung characterized the decision as "extreme" and "bad for our farmers and the American people." Dung claimed that Vietnam is not "dumping basa on the US market." Dung appealed to the Ambassador to put forward

Vietnam's view to the Department of Commerce during his upcoming trip to Washington.

118. (SBU) The Ambassador explained that the GVN should keep in mind that trade disputes such as the catfish issue do not have a "political" solution. Dumping cases will be settled through the trade dispute resolution process. They are unlikely to receive attention at the senior political levels.

COMMENT

119. (SBU) The possibility of parole and/or emigration to the U.S for Dr. Que is the most striking aspect of this discussion, and Ambassador will pursue this option both with Dr. Que's brother and with GVN officials. The GVN may be beginning to learn the Chinese lesson of the usefulness of deliverables, although it is also possible that Dung was talking off the top of his head. Dung continues to appear, on the whole, to be a good interlocutor. Similar to the March meeting (ref a), he showed flashes of "old speak," but he is willing to listen, generally reasonable, and seems genuinely interested in promoting stronger ties with the U.S. in a number of areas. While the long-range impact of the meetings is difficult to predict, they should help increase mutual understanding and ensure that our point of view is clearly heard by the senior GVN leadership.
BURGHARDT